



## Mountain School Teachers on MTB – MLE Program: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Inquiry

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**Abstract** – *The study focused on the Lived experiences of teachers in Mountain Barangay in implementing the MTB – MLE program. The study utilized the qualitative method using hermeneutic phenomenology to gather honest-to-goodness feedback on the program implementation of MTB-MLE direct from its implementers -the teachers themselves based on their lived experiences. This will also validate if the MTB-MLE program is still worth keeping or not anymore. The study informants were selected through a purposive-conducive type of sampling, and data gathering was done through one-on-one interviews. Based on the general findings of the study, it can be inferred that the informants find MTB (Sinugbuanong Bisaya) effective as a medium of instruction for lower-grade, Bisaya-speaking pupils residing in mountain barangays. However, they find it irrelevant and a burden as a subject because of the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the MTB-MLE program implementation in schools as manifested in their struggles being unequipped regarding skills training in teaching the mother tongue and quality and reliable learning resources. These MTB-MLE challenges faced by the teachers have resulted in poor learning outcomes for their pupils, specifically when it comes to their literacy and numeracy skills, and yet they have also realized that out of these difficulties, they were able to tap their resourcefulness and innovativeness as teachers and they were able to discover effective teaching strategies and approaches.*

**Keywords:** *mother tongue-based, multilingual education, and medium of instruction*

### Introduction

In the process of teaching and learning, language is crucial. It is a fundamental tool for communicating with others in order to express one's thoughts, feelings, and actions. Teachers use it as a medium to impart knowledge and skills to their students. The teacher and the students must speak the same language—the language that they both understand and find most comfortable using—in order for the learning to be most effective and the communication process to run smoothly. Moreover, our educational system, through its agency, the Department of Education (DepEd), began implementing the use of MTB-MLE in all public schools in the year 2012, specifically in kindergarten as an instructional medium only and in Grades 1, 2, and 3 as both a subject and an instructional medium in all subject areas with the exception of English and Filipino. Because of this, the government's primary goal in putting this policy into action is to lay the groundwork for young students to study their mother tongue or first language before learning any other languages. The assumption is that MTB-MLE is a launching pad for students to realize their

mother tongue before moving on to other languages. The mother tongue is used as a medium of teaching in all learning areas from kindergarten through grade three, with the exception of English and Filipino. The program focuses on developing speaking, reading, and writing in the mother tongue beginning in Grades 1, 2, and 3. The "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013," also known as Republic Act No. 10533, emphasizes using the mother tongue as the language for instructional materials and learning assessments. Since that time, MTB-MLE has been adopted as a subject or learning area to be taught for Grades (1-3) and as an instruction language for Kindergarten, Grades 1, 2, and 3.

In accordance with Republic Act 10533, the implementation of the MTB-MLE in K-12 Program is based on this starting point - where the learners are and what they already know. This is supported by the research of Jaca and Soledad (2022), who discovered that using one's native language or mother tongue provides a solid foundation for learning a second language. The research of Dekker (2010) demonstrates that it is an effective instrument for enhancing learners' fluency, accuracy, and proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing for meaning and confidence. In addition, Mallareddy (2012) emphasized the significance of mother tongue education in early learning for a successful undergraduate education system. Benson (2005) also highlighted the advantages of teaching in the mother tongue language in schools, which include an increase in female enrollment, an increase in the active participation of parents, a decrease in sexual exploitation by teachers, an improvement in learning, and an increase in the number of women who become teachers. Khan, Humayun, and Khan (2015) also noted that MTB-MLE improved children's sense of belonging and receptivity in the classroom, as well as their performance in affective, psychomotor, and cognitive behaviors. Similarly, Sario, Guiab, and Palting (2014) discovered that using the mother tongue in the classroom made students more active, participatory, and interactive, as well as increased their sense of class belonging and receptivity. On the basis of these previous studies, it is believed that using the child's mother tongue as the medium of instruction has a positive influence or effect on the child's academic achievement.

On the other hand, other significant local studies have concluded that MTB-MLE hurts children's English literacy and development, and this was supported by experimental research (Namanya, 2017) in which learners demonstrated a significant decline in their English proficiency when taught exclusively in the mother tongue. Other studies have found that teachers struggle to find ways to improve the performance and participation of their students, given the limited local materials available for classroom use and the little training in multilingual education (Jaca & Soledad, 2022). Similarly, teachers implementing MTB-MLE have encountered challenges because this mother tongue has not been widely used as a medium of instruction. In addition, teachers lacked training in delivering education in the mother tongue, which diminished the quality of their teaching (Medilo, 2016; Wa-Mbaleka, 2014a, 2014b, 2015). In addition, it has been observed that many concepts written in English have no equivalents in the various native tongues of the Philippines, requiring teachers to continue using English terms (Medilo, 2016). With these obstacles and difficulties, MTB-MLE may impede the learners' ability to acquire skills and knowledge about themselves and the world. This issue was even emphasized by the chairman of the Senate Basic Education Committee, Senator Sherwin Gatchalian, who made a personal appeal to the Department of Education (Deped) on May 3, 2021 to close the gaps in the implementation of mother tongue-based education and other approaches under its K to 12 program (Terrazola, 2021).

The MTB-MLE implementation has now been in place for eleven years. Before MTB-MLE's actual adoption, it appears that no extensive and comprehensive pilot testing was conducted representing the various regions of the nation. The program was only recently put into effect

through DepED order # 16 in the academic year 2012–2013, and it was thought to be the result of a Philippine Linguistic Society advocacy push rather than a thorough, accurate feasibility study. According to the study of (Dekker and Walter, 2011), the experimental study titled "First language education in Lubuagan, Northern Philippines" conducted in the year 2008 in Lubuagan Kalinga was the primary study that ignited the implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines. This study was primarily in response to the late DECS Secretary Gonzalez's call for innovative approaches to literacy and education, specifically in minority language communities. Evidently, it was not intended to serve as a pilot project to evaluate the viability of implementing the MTB MLE program in the future. However, the findings of the study had solidified the conceptualization and implementation of MTB-MLE in the Philippines, and it had proven to be successful, particularly in the locale of the study only, as it provided initial solid evidence that the use of the mother tongue for instructional purposes, in fact, enhances mastery of lesson content, including in the more critical areas of Math and Science, and it fosters a love of learning and a hunger for more knowledge on the part of the students. The fact that the participants— Lubuagan, elementary school students—all spoke the same first language, Lubuagan, was a significant factor in the study's success. This suggests that the MTB-MLE program might benefit a community that speaks just one language. But would that still be true in a place where there are multiple mother tongues or in a multilingual community? Until it is validated and tested by an actual study, the answer to this question is still undetermined.

The MTB-MLE program was obviously still in its infancy when it was initially adopted in our country, and it stands to reason that there may have been many gaps and failures in its execution over the course of 11 years. The plan looks like an experimental approach based on trial-and-error procedures, with the outcome being completely random. Those who suffer the most from its failures are the educators and the students. The decline in Filipino students' English competence has been linked to the MTB-MLE program, as reported by (Dela Pena, 2023). The findings of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) corroborated this, showing that Filipino university graduates had English skills below the benchmark set for Thai high school students. The Department of Education (DepEd) defended themselves as the program's brains by saying that teaching pupils in their native languages is to blame for a drop in their English skills. Just last year, the Philippines is again reported to have slipped from 18th place to 22nd place out of 111 countries with a score of 578 in the 2022 edition of the English Proficiency Index ("PHILIPPINES DROPS TO 22ND IN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY RANKING," 2022). This must be alarming to the DepEd as this data speaks volumes of what must have really happened in implementing the MTB-MLE program. In response to this status report of 2022, the Department of Education was reported to have contemplated the possibility of ditching out the mother tongue as a subject while retaining it as a medium of instruction. No less than the Education Undersecretary - Epimaco Densing mentioned that the 5-minute mother tongue subject would be replaced by reading and mathematics programs (Philstar, 2022).

In contrast to what was planned by DepED last year, (Chi, 2023) reported that the House of Representatives has already approved a bill this year that seeks to suspend the use of mother tongue as the principal medium of instruction in the lower grades (Kindergarten through Grade 3). This is based on the premise that the suspension would provide sufficient time for the DepED and school districts to develop and acquire sufficient learning materials to completely implement the use of mother tongue. This is likely a response to the instructors' complaints about the lack of MTB-MLE learning resources for many years. Recent legislation requires DEped and the Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino to determine which school districts can completely implement mother-tongue-based instruction and which localities have multiple native languages.

However, Representative France Castro of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers (ACT) party-list voiced out his sentiments and strongly opposed the said suspension plan. He emphasized that this problem needs political will on the part of the lawmakers and that we need to know the roots of the problem by listening to the teachers and other stakeholders and identifying the inadequacies of the program for us to come up with short-term and medium-term solutions. In April 2023, the Department of Education (DepEd) formally proposed their last year's plan of removing the separate Mother Tongue subject in the primary level and that English will be taught as early as the first quarter for Grade 1 students, earlier than the current third quarter. Mother Tongue will no longer be offered as a separate subject in Grades 1 to 3 and instead will be used to teach other subjects, primarily English and Filipino. However, this proposal was opposed by the Chairman of the Alliance of Concerned Teachers- Mr. Vlademir Quetua with his contention that Mother Tongue should continue to be taught as a subject and the DepEd should rectify its errors in the problematic implementation of the Mother Tongue program (Mateo, 2023).

Given this clashing of opinions and opposing solutions given by the Department of Education and House of Representatives as well as the party-list Alliance of Concerned Teachers, with respect to the current trouble on MTB-MLE Program Implementation, it is pronounced that our educational system is sick and it is now in great crisis.

This study was initiated in response to the escalating MTB-MLE controversy because now is the optimal moment to collect feedback on the MTB-MLE implementation from its front-line employees, the teachers. Teachers facilitate the teaching-learning process and implement MTB-MLE directly in the classroom. They have firsthand knowledge of the program's advantages and disadvantages, or the bright side and the gloomy side. They are the stress absorber of this MTB-MLE's ongoing commotion and problems. As one of the program's stakeholders, they have the authority to determine whether the program succeeded, failed, or is still struggling, and they are the best people to consult about how the program and its implementation can be improved. Within this premise, this investigation was devised. The objective was to assess the performance of the MTB-MLE program from the perspective of its direct implementers, the teachers, by documenting their actual experiences with MTB-MLE as a subject and instructional medium. It aimed to record their free-flowing narration of experiences, including their struggles, difficulties, and frustrations, as well as their joys and revelations, realizations, and insights regarding the MTB-MLE Program Implementation.

## **Methods and Materials**

This study is a qualitative type of research using the approach of hermeneutic phenomenology. The conduct of this study was to simply put a prime value on the subjective knowledge and lived experiences of informants (MTB-MLE Teachers) as well as on the derived meaning of their experiences through thematic analysis. This qualitative data analysis involved the following steps, as follows:

1. Transcribing all the data gathered (verbatim manner) from the one-on-one audio-recorded and in-person interview.
2. Familiarizing the data by thoroughly going through the transcripts of the interview to get an understanding of the data collected.
3. Identifying meaningful units or codes by highlighting the phrases, sentences or paragraphs which are essential and meaningful. This was done point by point, meaning by meaning.
4. Grouping the meaningful codes into specific themes, identifying the main concepts that emerge from the data, and grouping related significant themes to create the general themes.

5. Writing a summary narrative that describes the essence of each general theme. This should include contextual information, the nature of the phenomenon, what the participants experienced, and the meaning of the experience.
6. Identifying commonalities and contradictions. Analyzing the data for similarities and differences among the themes – and looking for patterns and connections that emerge.

Moreover, the research instrument of this study is the team of researchers who conducted the individual in-depth interview with the informants in a free-flowing manner using only one uniform question: “How would you describe your experience teaching MTB-MLE as a subject and as a medium of instruction?” (Discuss your answer openly, honestly and comprehensively. You may speak in English or Bisaya or both.” Follow-up questions were only done if needed.

Non-probability sampling method, precisely a purposive-convenience type, was the one used in the selection of informants. It was based on one specific criterion set by the researchers themselves (a minimum of four years teaching MTB-MLE as a subject and as a medium of instruction in any public elementary school here in the province of Cebu) and also based on the convenience of the researchers since they could readily access the schools as they knew the school heads.

The study’s Informants are the seven (7) tenured female public-school teachers who have taught MTB-MLE as a subject and as a medium of instruction for more than four years. Four (4) of these informants are from Calibasan Elementary School, a school situated on a mountainside of Sitio Calibasan, Captain Claudio, Toledo City, South of Cebu and the other three (3) are from Adlaon Integrated School-a Mountain barangay school located in barangay Adlaon, Cebu City. Both these schools are considered remote areas wherein transportation access is difficult, internet connectivity is very unstable and the mobile signal is usually erratic. Data gathering was either done on-site (inside the school campus) or off-site (outside the school campus) through one-on-one interviews with the (7) selected informants last April 18-20, 2023, and April 29-30, 2023.

## **Results and Discussion**

Based on the thematic analysis done of the transcripts of the unfiltered narrations of the informants, six general themes were generated, namely: MTB (Sinugbuanong Bisaya) as a medium of instruction is effective; MTB (Sinugbuanong Bisaya) as a subject is irrelevant; inadequacies of MTB-MLE; inconsistencies of MTB-MLE; MTB-MLE Program - a hindrance to pupils’ literacy and numeracy and lastly, the teachers’ realizations and discoveries out of their MTB-MLE experiences.

### **Theme 1: MTB (Sinugbuanong Binisaya) as a medium of instruction is effective**

MTB-MLE teachers highly favored the use of Mother Tongue-Based (MTB) Sinugbuanong Binisaya as a medium of instruction (MOI) in lower grades, particularly to the learners living in the remote mountain barangays of Cebu Province because they found it compelling and well-suited to their learners. The teachers felt comfortable and confident using Sinugbuanong Binisaya as a language of instruction in the classroom because of the thought that it is very organic not only to them but also to the learners. MTB Sinugbuanong Binisaya is the first language of the students, and it is the same language that they have been exposed to, not only in their homes but also in their community. This means that both the teachers and the learners share common ground and a common language, and this, in turn, impacts a lot of beautiful things in the

classroom, such as facilitates the teaching-learning process, it encourages self-expression and classroom participation to the learners, it develops competencies and builds confidence on the part of the learners, and it gives positive learning outcome to the learners thereby boosting their morale as well as that of the teachers’.

This claim is supported by the findings of the study of Eslit (2017), which emphasized that Binisaya instruction plays a dynamic and facilitating role in the classroom and improves the comprehension and proficiency of learners. The study of Dekker (2010) also proved the same, and it highlighted the effectiveness of the mother tongue specifically in building fluency and ability in listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and it assisted the learners in acquiring knowledge faster and easier, making them display good performance and understand the lessons easily even in other subjects. Likewise, the study of (Richard, 2001) and (Smit et al., 2008) proved that the mother tongue promotes learners’ participation which in turn produces learners’ improvement and achievement in the classroom.

Here are the statements of the following informants that reflect the aforementioned claim:

*“I find my teaching experience in MTB as a medium of instruction Ma’am, I think it’s easy because our own dialect here, especially my pupil’s noh dire sa bukid are Bisaya, they are using Bisaya at home, they can easily understand if I speak Bisaya also in the classroom.”* **My students at the mountain barangay school where I teach speak Binisaya, which makes it easy for me to use MTB as a way to teach. They speak Binisaya at home, so it's easy for them to understand when I speak it in the school.** (Informant 7)

*“So as a medium of instruction, I find it kanang useful. Useful sia nga medium of instruction sa pagtudlo nako sa akong mga bata especially sa lower grades man mi. Mas dali jud sia mapasabot ang mga lessons sa other subjects or even sa MTB pud. Maka build ug confidence kung mag Binisaya ang bata. Mas Feel nila ba mas kamao sila. Kay mas maka share sila sa ilahang kanang idea ba ron in their own language.”* **MTB (Sinugbuanong Binisaya) as a medium of instruction is very useful to my pupils in lower grades because it can make them understand the lessons easily, not just in other subjects but also in MTB. Also, using the mother tongue can build the learners’ confidence as it will make them feel good and capable because they can easily share their ideas using their native language.** (Informant 2)

## **Theme 2: MTB (Sinugbuanong Bisaya) as a subject is irrelevant**

The informants expressed their views on implementing MTB-Sinugbuanong Binisaya as a subject for students in Grades 1, 2, and 3, and they candidly explained why they believed MTB as a subject was unnecessary. The first is that the learners are Bisaya speakers who are already very comfortable with their mother tongue, as it extends their autonomic nervous system. They use it daily without any additional effort, whether at home, school, or neighborhood. The learners' use of the mother tongue is already ingrained in their system and is, therefore, automatic. Second, the expected competencies of MTB-MLE (reading, writing, and speaking) are identical to those of

Filipino and English subjects, with the exception that teachers use Sinugbuanong Binisaya instruction; therefore, MTB as an additional subject is redundant and a burden to both teachers and students. On the part of the students, it would appear to be a waste of time to study the subject matter (MTB) formally in the classroom when they are already acquiring it naturally and on a daily basis outside of school. Thirdly, MTB is no longer taught as a subject in the upper grades (Grades 4-6), unlike Filipino and English, which are always conducted from Grade 1 through college.

In light of the aforementioned reasons provided by the informants, MTB as a subject is irrelevant and no longer required by the students. This idea is supported by Parba's (2018) research, which concluded that it is unnecessary to teach children Mother Tongue (MT) Cebuano because they are already acquiring it at home, and it is their native language. In addition, the study determined that the MTB-MLE policy is "superfluous" because Cebuano was already used in the classroom during the old bilingual education and is regarded as an auxiliary language in the teaching-learning process. Similarly, Cansino et al.'s (2022) study confirmed the same assertion, stating that MTB-MLE as a subject is irrelevant because it is redundant to the Filipino issue. According to the research conducted by Monje et al. (2019), the MTB subject has become an added burden for both instructors and students.

The following are the narrations of the informants reflecting the aforementioned claim.

*“Then burden sad kayo siya kay mao na gani atong tinabian, gipuno pa sa subject, mosamot na ug kadaghan. Ug akoy pangutan-on mas maayo ang MTB wagtangon na siya ba kay naa raman na permi ato gud nang dialect gud.”* **MTB-MLE is a big burden because it is our native language, and then it was added as a course, so it will only add to our workloads. If I were asked, I would say that MTB-MLE should not be a theme because it is always there because it is our own language.** (Informant 3)

*“Ang MTB pwede man na namo ma insert sa English nga subject. Kay mag translate man gihapon mi kay especially lower grades then naa mi sa bukid di man sila kasabot ug pure English so kuanan gihapon namo ug Binisaya so makakuha ra gihaponang bata...Lisod jud kayo, mag translate pa gyud mi ug English nia translate sa Bisaya. Ingon ana.”* **The MTB-MLE as a subject can be added to the English subject since we would still do "Binisaya" translation in our lower grade classes. Our school is mountainous, and the students don't understand pure English, so we would still use Binisaya translation. This way, the kids will be able to understand our lesson. It is really very hard, and we would still teach English to Binisaya.** (Informant 2)

### **Theme 3: MTB-MLE Program-a hindrance to pupils' literacy and numeracy**

Since the informants think MTB (Sinugbuanong Binisaya) is useless and no longer needed by students in lower grades, they also think MTB-MLE is terrible for students reading and math skills. Here are some examples to show that this claim is valid:

When kids in lower grades move up to Grade 4, the MTB-MLE program makes it hard for them to make the change. The students seemed to have been so used to using their home tongue to talk for four years that they now find it hard to switch to English, the new language of instruction.

This means that the students aren't slowly getting ready for the change while they're in lower grades. By the time they get to Grade 4, it will be a big shock and a big difference for them, which will hurt their performance in both reading and math.

Also, MTB-MLE seems to slow down teaching and learning in the classroom because most of the new, complicated MTB terms used in MTB textbooks or references have to be translated into English or Tagalog. Teachers have to put in a lot of hard work and thought into the translation work they do from time to time so that they can lead interesting talks and explain the lesson in a way that students can understand.

MTB- is deemed inappropriate for Math and Science because these are globally taught subjects with English references and textbooks. Clearly, it would be difficult to prepare for these subjects using only MTB as the medium of instruction, as they both contain numerous terminologies for which there are no Sinugbuanong Bisaya equivalents. In the end, the teacher will continue to use the English term and provide Bisaya examples to make the word understandable to the students while adhering to the protocol of using MTB as the medium of instruction. Because the students will be evaluated using MTB as the medium of instruction during evaluation time. Teachers are compelled to employ the MTB method of teaching MATH AND SCIENCE, despite its inadequacy and impracticality. This presents teachers with a formidable challenge regarding how to present or convey the lesson in pure Sinugbuanong Binisaya. This is something new for both teachers and students, and they must navigate these changes with great difficulty rather than simplicity.

MTB hinders students' English and Filipino literacy. MTB-MLE aims to function as the students' bridge language of instruction. This implies that by mastering the mother dialect first, students could acquire English and Filipino more quickly. In contrast, the instructors observed the exact opposite. As a result of ten years of MTB implementation, it has been determined that Grade 4 students exhibited weak English and Filipino literacy skills. Like the instructors, the students appear to become entrenched in MTB for four academic years (kindergarten through third grade), making it difficult for them to transition to learning English and Filipino as subjects and languages of instruction.

The aforementioned claims align with the findings of Sanchez et al.'s (2023) study, which found that MTB-MLE leads to poor performance in other subjects, such as English, Science, and Mathematics. Namanya (2017) and a number of previous researchers who were able to investigate the negative effects of MTB-MLE on children's English literacy development reached the same conclusion. Moreover, the study by Lopez (2019) reinforced the aforementioned findings by emphasizing that the second language (Filipino) and third language (English) deterioration is attributable to the MTB-MLE policy's lack of well-established bridging practices, particularly between grades 3 and 4, when the transition to the use of English and Filipino as media of instruction occurs. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000, 2008) asserts that for MTB-MLE programs to be successful, transition programs must be in place so that operational transitions can justify the transfer of linguistic and cognitive abilities from the native language to the second and third languages (Cummins, 2000).

Here are the excerpts of the explanations of the informants regarding this matter:

*“Ang MTB sad mura sad siya’g hindrance nga dili gani kayo makasabot ug English ug Filipino kay nowadays kun imo jud tan-awon kana gali simple English, maglisud man ang bata ug sabot. Mao na nga lisud jud kayo na ang MTB”.* **MTB as a subject is a hindrance to pupils’ literacy especially in English and Filipino. Nowadays, learners have difficulty understanding simple English words. MTB is really a hindrance.**



(Informant 3)

*“Sa akong nabantayan gud sa akong pag teach for 4 years, mostly ang higher grades teachers like me kay mag problema sila kay ultimo sit na word, dili kabalo ang mga bata. Very basic and simple ra bya kaayo na nga word pero dili kamao ang mga bata labi na dre sa bukid.”* **In my four years of teaching, I have observed that teachers in higher grades, including myself, usually encountered problems with the learners because even the word “sit”, a basic action word, learners do not know what this means. It’s so easy and simple but our pupils here in mountain barangay school do not know what this means.** (Informant 4)

*“So, mag binisaya, mas ok sia, makasabot sila. Pero ari sad lagi ka sa ilang performance sa other subjects. Like sa English jud specifically, gagmay jud sila ug scores sa among mga exams.”* **So, using MTB Binisaya is okay because the learners can understand. But when it comes to their performance in other subjects like English specifically, they got low exam scores.** (Informant 2)

#### **Theme 4: Inadequacies of the MTB-MLE Program**

On the basis of their actual observations and experiences, the informants identified the shortcomings of the MTB-MLE program in terms of learning resources and teacher training. They disclosed that from the time they first taught MTB-MLE until now, neither appropriate training on MTB-MLE teaching nor a teacher's guide or manual to serve as a reference was provided. Moreover, these difficulties in implementing the MTB-MLE in grades K-12 have been attributed to a lack of teachers trained in using the mother tongue as the primary medium of instruction, as well as the schools' strict adherence to the program (Chi, 2023).

The aforementioned issue only implies that most teachers, including the informants of this study, lack background, orientation, and training on MTB-MLE. These instructors had no alternative but to rely on their common sense and initiative to teach MTB MLE in the classroom. Possibly, DepEd assumed that MTB-MLE would be simple for teachers to handle, similar to other language subjects they have prepared for a long time, without taking into account that it is a new subject and a new program. The teachers also revealed great difficulty teaching MTB-MLE, particularly in their first few years of teaching the subject, due to a lack of training and learning resources such as textbooks, reference materials, dictionaries, workbooks/learning kits, and teacher guides. This claim was supported by a study conducted by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies, which found that less than 10% of the more than 16,000 schools they surveyed had fully complied with the four primary requirements of DepEd for implementing mother-tongue-based multilingual education, namely orthography, grammar, learning resources, and a dictionary (PIDS, 2022). This further implies that the majority of schools across the nation are not yet equipped with MTB-MLE-related learning materials and teacher training.

Moreover, the only materials teachers have are the existing MTB Textbooks, which seem unaligned with Sinugbuanong Bisaya and are just helpful for presentation. These textbooks' terms are unfamiliar to informants and students alike. They struggle with the words. Mother tongue-based what now? To confuse or simplify? They considered this contradicting position a strain because they had to study hard and learn the new MTB terms. They said class preparation, visual aids,

activity planning, and delivery need a lot of time and money. In addition, their school is in a mountain barrio, thus internet connection is unreliable or nonexistent. The informants teach MTB-MLE as a learning area and media by relying on themselves and their peers. Informants' accounts support this claim:

*“Kuan na diay ko I am in my almost 4 years in teaching. Then pag first year nako pag abot jud diri. Sa bukid man mi nga part noh. Dili pa kayo ko familiar sa MTB nga lessons, then kanang ang mga, like for example types of sentences. Naay mga...unsay Inenglish. in English subject, naay interrogative, declarative, imperative. Mao to naglisod ko ug unsa man binisaya ug Naglisod ko ug translate. Wala ko kahibalosa terms actually unsay gamiton ana. But Naa kono. ang nakalisod wala mi, wala koy guide, wala koy teachers guide or wala koy reference ba. Kay wala ambot wala may gihatag sa akoo. Wala siay gibilin sa akoo Walay turn over sa books.”* **(By the way, I am now in my four years of teaching. Then in my first year or when I first got in here, in a mountain barangay school, I was not yet very familiar with MTB lessons, just like the type of sentences: interrogative, declarative, imperative. I find it hard to translate all these in Binisaya. I do not know what terms to use. I know there are corresponding Bisaya terms. But I really find it difficult to translate because I don't have a teacher's guide as my reference. I don't know ... Nothing was given or turned over to me. There was no turnover of books) - Informant 2**

*“Mas dugay siya e-prepare compare sa other subjects, daghan kag e-consider, then also, ang learning resources nato bitaw, limited kaayo, bentaha ron kay naa tay module, pero mao lageh na nga kita nga naa ta sa bukid, limited atong tanan mga resources, like printer, unya, kung wala sad tay internet, dili sad ta ka- download ug mga supplementary materials, mao na, doble kayod, mao nay nakapaet, kuot sa kaugalingong bulsa para sa bata..ug moengon ta nga maka nosebleed ang English, masmaka nosebleed ang MTB kay ang MTB nga ilang gepasabot is no longer the mother tongue based kung dili, ang words nga wala gyud nato gegamit sukad masukad pagkamatngon nato ug buot, malibog tag asa mane gikan, nya karon ang kabag-uhan baya nato ron ang MTB nato kay mix language kay naay mga foreign language like kanang gikan sa latin, naay Japanese nga word, kanang Chinese, halu-halo baya atong kuan, labi na natong mga Cebuano, samot na gyud ta ane, ang resulta dili na gyud kita, dili nata Pinoy, mura nag product of mixed races, mga bata bitaw malibog.”* **(MTB-MLE takes longer to prepare than other subjects because learning resources are limited, we already have a module, and we live in a mountain area with limited resources like printers and internet connections. Thus, we sacrifice our own money for the children, making it a double effort. MTB generates even more nosebleed than English because it is no longer mother-tongue-based and employs terms we have never heard since we were aware. We couldn't place these words. Our MTB now includes Latin, Japanese, and Chinese words. Our ancestral tongue,**

**Cebuano, is already mixed by nature, especially for us. We've lost our Cebuano identity. We're mixed-race. This will confuse kids.** (Informant 6)

### **Theme 5: Inconsistencies of MTB-MLE as a program:**

Due to the apparent inadequacies of MTB-MLE as a program, a great deal of inconsistency in its implementation in schools is to be anticipated. The following are the most noteworthy personal experiences of the informants:

The MTB-MLE lesson plan as a subject is prepared in English, but the anticipated delivery of the instructor, including discussion and preparation of visual aids, is in the instructor's native language. The students are also evaluated or assessed in their mother dialect. Therefore, MTB-MLE is obviously misaligned as a subject. Unlike the English subject, the lesson plan is prepared in English and is also presented in English by the teacher. The identical is true for Filipino as a subject; Filipino lesson plans are developed and Filipino lessons are taught.

In MTB -MLE, it is required that Kinder use mother tongue as the medium of instruction, including in its learning materials. The preparation stage before kindergarten, which is Daycare (for public schools), however, uses English as the language of instruction; counting the numbers, identifying colors, shapes, figures/objects and body parts, animals, and vegetation are all taught in English. The students become accustomed to English terms rather than their native tongue. As a result of this abrupt change from English to the native language, it is difficult for the students to make the necessary transition.

The terminology used in MTB textbooks and references is no longer compatible with the Sinugbuanong Binisaya of the newer generation. Language is dynamic and constantly changing, just like its users. The Sinugbuanong Binisaya of fifty years ago may no longer be identical to the Sinugbuanong Binisaya of today. The majority of terms used in the current MTB are obsolete. Sinugbuanong Binisaya textbooks are so complex or difficult to comprehend that neither instructors nor students are conversant with them. Some of the terminology used in the books cannot even be considered Bisayan. Therefore, it presents a challenge for instructors, who must serve as both the facilitator of learning and the recipient of knowledge.

It essentially defeats the purpose of MTB-MLE, which is to use a language with which students are comfortable and most familiar to facilitate classroom learning. MTB hinders the learning process of the students as opposed to promoting it. In turn, these impacts both teachers and students/pupils. Furthermore, neither the teachers nor the students have Sinugbuanong Bisaya dictionaries to serve as a reference for newly encountered Sinugbuanong vocabulary. Internet access in mountainous regions is also unreliable or impossible. In addition, the Internet could not define all Sinugbuanong Binisaya terms.

The mother dialect of today's Cebuanos or students may no longer be the traditional Sinugbuanong Bisaya. Language does evolve just like individuals do evolve. Sinugbuanong Bisaya has already evolved. Numerous years have elapsed and innumerable things have evolved. We must adapt to these changes and not become mired in the past, the old Sinugbuanong Bisaya, to meet the requirements of the younger generation in the present. The youth of today, particularly the Cebuanos, are already accustomed to speaking a combination of Bisaya and English. BisayaLish is their native tongue and the language with which they are most accustomed. This is merely their new mother dialect, not the original Sinugbuanong Bisaya.

Teaching MTB-MLE as a subject and as a medium of instruction is challenging for teachers, particularly those who are new to the profession because it requires significant effort and adjustment on their part. In addition, MTB teaching was not part of their training during their

college education or even the college curriculum.

These inconsistencies in the implementation of the MTB-MLE program in schools are merely a reflection of how the program was developed a decade ago and how it has been implemented from its inception to the present day. The research conducted by (Cansino, 2023) concurs with this assertion and reveals that MTB-MLE as a program requires additional revisions to address the following: the development of educational materials and comprehensive linguistic studies devoted to documenting the various minority languages. Before applying or implementing an educational concept or principle on a large scale, it is essential to contextualize it according to the study's findings. Similarly, Lopez et al. (2019) found that inconsistency between policy and practice in the Philippine educational system demonstrates a high level of duplicity that exacerbates the further deterioration of student learning.

Indigenous pupils have limited access to quality education. Unquestionably, Filipino students in grades K through 12 have access to additional English-learning opportunities, so assessing them in English is in their favor. Indigenous students in rural areas with limited access to these opportunities will suffer if they are evaluated in English. The study (Tupas and Martin, 2017) also highlighted the inconsistency of the DepEd in excluding specific languages from the MTB-MLE policy, as it only authorized 19 indigenous languages to be used in schools.

The following are the excerpts of the narrations of the informants reflecting the above-mentioned inconsistencies of the MTB-MLE Program implementation:

*“English baya itudlo nila especially sa numbers 12345678910. Inig ari sa kinder, kuan . mao na. Dili man sila moingon ug usa duha tulo. . Maoy struggle namo . need pa namo sia I- translate sa ilang naandan nga nahibal an nga language. Moingon ka ug usa , English ana one aron sila makasabot Kay lahi raman sa daycare, ug ari naka sa kinder ug grade 1 Binisaya na sia. kasagaran baya sa mga bata ni eskwela baya day care nia Dili man sila mag binisaya didto. Especially sa colors wala baya silay bughaw, lunhaw, dalag, asul. Kay ang ila didto red, yellow, green, Ana man itudlo nila. Ang first nimo nahibal an mao baya mo tatak sa imoha. Maon na ang isa, one na ang English. Sa ingon ana nga paagi, makaila sila”.* **The Daycare teaches English, particularly when it comes to numerals - 12345678910. When they reach kindergarten, they will no longer speak Bisaya; therefore, we must translate it into a language they are familiar with. If you say "usa," you will explain that the equivalent English word is "one" for them to comprehend, because day care is distinct from kindergarten and grade one, where Bisaya is used. Especially in terms of hues, there are no "bughaw, lunhaw, dalag, and asul." Because the colors red, yellow, and green were taught in the daycare. What is initially taught will remain in your memory for a long time.** (Informant 1)

*“Wala kayo ang textbook. Ang hatag ra gyud sa gobyerno mao rajud na among gisundan. Ambot lang pud kaha ug naa bay libro nga gibaligya ang mga bookstore. Mangita gani ka ug libro sa private schools, ang private schools nangita jud na sila ug paagi pero wala sad gani kayo na silay MTB na libro nia lisud sad cya kay pila rasad pudkabook nia dili*

*bya ta fluent sa aning binisaya gud kay atong binisaya sagol na bya dili na sinugbuanong Binisaya. Nia dili bya gyud sinugbuanong binisaya jud kay as what Iveheard, dili Cebuano ang naghimo sa libro nga MTB. Dili jud binisaya kay kon binisaya gud ug pangutan-on ning mga guwang na dili man gani sila kasabot. Sus kanang idibuho grabi jud nakong bangga-bangga ana unsa man jud na siya".* **It is not really present in textbooks. We adhere to the guidelines set forth by the government. I have no idea whether a book is being sold in the bookstore. I intend to search for books in private schools, as private schools are attempting to acquire MTB books, but they have a very limited number of MTB books. We do not speak Bisaya fluently, and our Bisaya is no longer pure Sinugbuanong Bisaya; therefore, what was written in the books is not the genuine Sinugbuanong Bisaya, as the author of MTB Books for Sinugbuanong Bisaya is not a Cebuano. It is not actually Bisaya terms, as even the elderly is unfamiliar with it and do not comprehend it. Similar to the word "idibuho" (draw), I initially find it difficult to comprehend its meaning.** (Informant 3)

## **Theme 6: Teachers' discoveries/realizations about the MTB-MLE Program**

While the informants shared their real-life struggles and difficulties encountered while teaching MTB-MLE in the classroom, they could not ignore the fact that they also obtained valuable insights and realizations as a result. Here are the most important:

### **Sub-them 6.1: Mixed use of MTB Binisaya and English**

First, they discovered that the combined use of MTB-Binisaya and English is an effective method for preparing students to transition from lower to upper grades. The instructors observed that the students would have a difficult time transitioning from third to fourth grade if they are not adequately prepared earlier. The change would be abrupt, necessitating a significant amount of adjustment on their part, which would likely hurt their academic performance. The learners will be able to prepare themselves psychologically, emotionally, and cognitively for the upcoming change of scene, which is the exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction in all of the learning areas if the transitional preparations are done gradually via successive approximation (approach of "slowly but surely"). This will also serve as practice for their eventual transition from pure Binisaya to pure English in Grade 4. The transitory preparation will also allow students to begin their voyage toward global competitiveness through the acquisition or mastery of multiple languages at an earlier age. Here are excerpts from the informant's account describing this realization and discovery:

*"For me mas ganahan lang ko nga mas mo advance ug mo wide pa ang ilahang hunahuna daan ba kay since ang language man gud nato is mag medium of instruction man ta from Kinder- grade 3, so sa akoa pud gina-use pud na nako. Pero gisagolan langnako ug gagmay nga English kay preparation baya pud ni para sa ilaha nga mo higher grades na sila".* **I would like them to learn the English language earlier because from kinder to Grade 3, they are used to MTB, So I mixed my classroom instruction with English to prepare them when they are already in**

**higher grades. (Informant 4)**

*“Pero sa akon lang jud part is magpabilin lang sad diay jud ta sa atong tinabian lang nga when it comes to education baya gyud kay ga evolve then we are preparing the kids man no. Mag-prepare ta nila then unsaon man nga nig padung nila sa higher grades, magkaanam ug kuan bitaw nia dili diay nila magamit, and education jud nagkaanam biya ug ka high. Then ug magprepare ta sa bata, dire lang gyud ta kutob. Sa ako lang part ba, okey ra man ang MTB pero dili lang jud mtb lang tanan imong itudlo sa bata. Parehas gud nato diba nga nakaabot ta sa traditional time sauna nga ngano lageh kita nindot man lage tag outcome, karon base sa ako lang pud nakita. Nga atong nakat-onan mas ni wide pa jud bitaw kay gamay pa lang daan dili na kay ni focus lang ka nga diri raka kutob, mas nindot nga tudloan nato ug laing language ang mga bata mintras gamay pa kay sila man gud ang foundation gud para ig higher grades na magkaanam napud ug high level ang ilang makat-onan.”* **On my part, I would like to prepare my learners to be globally competitive when it comes to language facility. As education becomes more advanced, I would like my students to be adaptive to that change. That's why I'm using mixed languages, (Bisaya, Filipino ang English as my medium of instruction.”** (Informant 4)

**Sub-theme 6.2. Teacher qualities and preparations needed in teaching MTB.**

The second subtheme focuses on the teacher qualities that teachers discovered due to the failures, conflicts, and difficulties encountered when teaching MTB-ML with all of its deficiencies and inconsistencies. They were able to find and unearth information about themselves as well as their latent talents and skills. Indeed, experience is the greatest teacher. The following are the qualities that they believe an MTB instructor should possess: Professionalism, resourcefulness and tenacity, originality and innovation, tenacity, and fortitude. Here are the accounts provided by the informants.

*“Mas dugay siya e-prepare compare sa other subjects, daghan kag e-consider, then also, ang learning resources nato bitaw, limited kaayo, bentaha ron kay naa tay module, pero mao lageh nan ga kita nga naa ta sa bukid, limited atong tanan mga resources, like printer, unya, kung wala sad tay internet, dili sad ta ka downloads ug mga supplementary materials, mao na, doble kayod, mao nay nakapaet, kuot sa kaugalingog bulsa para sa bata.”* **It takes more time to prepare the lesson compared to other subjects, as there are numerous factors to consider. Furthermore, our learning resources, such as printers, are scarce, and if we do not have internet access, we cannot download supplementary learning materials.** (Informant 6)

*“Naay daghang books sa Kinder. Sinugbuanong Binisaya gyud ang ilang libro, lainlain gani na ug color. Mag-use baya pud ko ana pero mao lage while ang-explain ko nilasa textbook, ako sad ingnon ang English ani*

*kay aron sad ma familiar sad sila ba. Angakong pirmi gyud na gi use kay kining gehatag nila nga packet sa kinder nga Bisaya gyud siya. Naa nay worksheets. Aside ana mag search pud ko or maghimo ko ug lain nga aron mas masabtan pud nila".* **There are numerous kindergarten publications. It is in Sinugbuanong Bisaya, it has a diversity of colors. For them to become familiar with it, I will elucidate the corresponding English term when I discuss it. I frequently use the Bisaya learning materials that they provide. There are worksheets, but I will explore the internet in order to create additional learning materials to supplement their education. (Informant 4)**

## Conclusion

Teachers in the study agree that Sinugbuanong Bisaya (MTB) is an effective medium of instruction for Bisaya-speaking students in lower grades who live in mountain barangays; however, they view MTB as irrelevant and a burden as a subject due to the inadequacies and inconsistencies of the MTB-MLE program implementation in schools, which are reflected in their struggles with not being adequately equipped in terms of skills training in teaching the most. While teachers acknowledge that the difficulties they have encountered with MTB-MLE have led to bad outcomes for their students, particularly in terms of their literacy and numeracy skills, they also recognize that these challenges have allowed them to draw on their creativity and resourcefulness as educators and uncover some promising ways to enhance the MTB-MLE program at their schools. While the MTB-MLE program has numerous flaws, most of which can be traced back to a lack of thorough and scholarly planning and preparation prior to implementation, the program as a whole is still valuable.

## Recommendation

The following recommendations are positioned to revisit, overhaul and improve the implementation of the MTB-MLE Program:

1. Being in a linguistically diverse country with over 170 spoken dialects, it is a must for us to initially do the linguistic mapping nationwide to be given a visual layout of the geographic distribution of the speakers of a language in a specific region or place. By then, we will be able to identify the natural, dominant mother tongue(s) of each location based on evidence and not just on mere assumption.
2. Develop a comprehensive, need-based training program for MTB-MLE teachers for them to be better equipped and confident on how to prepare and conduct MTB-MLE classes and also for the pupils to have a quality learning experience in the classroom.
3. Come up with a standardized MTB-MLE teacher's guide in order for the teachers to have a uniform protocol or standards to follow when it comes to MTB-MLE teaching. This is to promote quality assurance in MTB-MLE teaching, which would benefit both the teachers and the pupils.
4. Conduct a thorough review and standardization of the existing MTB-MLE textbooks and references to retain only relevant and well-suited resources. Aim to produce more quality and standardized MTB-MLE learning resources coupled with adequate skills training for teachers in order to support the implementation of MTB-MLE fully.

5. Develop a clear and consistent approach to using MTB-MLE -the one that considers the context of the learners and their community.
6. Consider exploring a bilingual mode of instruction (Sinugbuanong Bisaya and English) in Grade 2 and Grade 3 in preparation for the transition phase in Grade 4, wherein English is used as the official language of instruction in the classroom. This is aimed at addressing the transition difficulties of the students with respect to the English language.
7. Conduct further research on the effectiveness of MTB and a bilingual mode of instruction in improving the learning outcomes of pupils as well as in supporting multilingualism.

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